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WAYNE COREY/BANGKOK

THAILAND'S COMMUNIST INSURGENCY

ANNCR:

FOR THE PAST MONTH, FOLLOWING THE ONSET OF THE DRY SEASON, COMMUNIST INSURGENTS IN THAILAND HAVE INCREASED THEIR ACTIVITY IN SEVERAL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. WITH A REPORT ON THE THAI ARMY COMMANDER'S VIEWS OF THE SITUATION, HERE IS WAYNE COREY IN BANGKOK:

VOICE:

THE ANTICIPATED INCREASE IN COMMUNIST ATTACKS ON GOVERNMENT AND POLICE POSITIONS IN RURAL AREAS OF NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN THAILAND WAS CONFIRMED BY ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL BOONCHAI BAMROONPONG WHO RECENTLY SPOKE TO A SMALL GROUP OF NEWSMEN HERE. HE SAYS, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THERE WERE EIGHT ATTACKS AGAINST GOVERNMENT FORCES BETWEEN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTY-FIFTH OF JANUARY.

THIS OBVIOUSLY LIMITED COMMUNIST DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE CERTAINLY DOES N O T COMPARE WITH PAST DRY SEASON COMMUNIST CAMPAIGNS IN INDOCHINA. BUT GENERAL BOONCHAI DOES N O T DISMISS THEIR IMPORTANCE. HE SAYS THEY MAY BE REGARDED AS PART OF A TREND WHICH REFLECTS WHAT HE SAYS, IS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE THAI COMMUNIST TO CAPTURE ALL SIXTEEN PROVINCES IN THE NORTHEAST. ACCORDING TO THE ARMY COMMANDER, THAI SECURITY FORCES INCLUDING THE MILITARY AND THE BORDER PATROL POLICE UNDER THE COMMAND OF THE INTERIOR MINISTRY, CAN CONTAIN THE THAI INSURGENTS IF THERE IS NO LARGE SCALE INFILTRATION OF OTHER TROOPS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES. BUT, HE SAYS, WEAPONS FOR THE INSURGENTS HAVE BEEN FLOWING INTO THAILAND FROM LAOS AND CAMBODIA.

ALTHOUGH THE NUMBER OF HARDCORE COMMUNISTS IS ESTIMATED AT ONLY ABOUT THREE TO FIVE THOUSAND, THIRTY ONE OF THAILAND'S SEVENTY ONE PROVINCES, ACCORDING TO GENERAL BOONCHAI, HAVE BEEN DECLARED COMMUNIST-INFILTRATED AREAS. AND HE SAYS HE HAS ASKED THE GOVERNMENT TO INCREASE THE SIZE OF THE POLICE AND VOLUNTEER FORCES BECAUSE, IN HIS WORDS, "WE ARE STILL USING CIVILIANS TO HELP SURPRESS THE COMMUNIST."

GENERAL BOONCHAI SAYS HE AGREES WITH SINGAPORE'S PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW THAT THERE IS A CONTINUED NEED FOR AMERICAN INFLUENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA TO HELP BALANCE OFF THE OTHER BIG POWERS. HE CONTENDS THAT COMMUNIST ELEMENTS CREATED A SITUATION IN WHICH IT BECAME NECESSARY FOR THE THAI GOVERNMENT TO ADOPT THE POLICY AIMED AT REMOVING THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE FROM THIS COUNTRY. "AS LONG AS AMERICAN FORCES ARE HERE," HE SAID, "THE COMMUNISTS WILL NOT BE ABLE TO SWALLOW US EASILY. YET HE ADDS THAT THEIR DEPARTURE WILL NOT AFFECT THAILAND'S DEFENSE SINCE THAILAND HAS NEVER USED AMERICAN TROOPS FOR THAT PURPOSE.

WHAT GENERAL BOONCHAI AND MANY THAI MILITARY LEADERS WORRY ABOUT IS THE EFFECT OF LONG TERM SUPPORT FOR THAI INSURGENTS, FROM LAOS, CAMBODIA AND SOUTH VIETNAM AND THE MAJOR COMMUNIST COUNTRIES. IN HIS WORDS, "LAOS AND CAMBODIA CAN AFFORD TO NOT TALK TO US BECAUSE THEY HAVE SOMEONE TO SUPPORT THEM BUT WE DON'T, WHICH PUTS US IN A DIFFICULT POSITION. GENERAL BOONCHAI ADDS: "IT IS LIKE A BOXING MATCH. THEY HAVE A BOY IN THEIR CORNER BUT WE DON'T ... AND WE HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES."

JS/RCS